



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTIONS, LICENSES AND PERMITS

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MEMORANDUM

MEMO TO: Hearing Examiner for Howard County

THROUGH: Robert Frances, P.E., Director
Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits

TO: Sean Kelly, Division Chief
Inspections and Enforcement Division

FROM: Ed Marquardt, Sign Code Inspector
Inspections and Enforcement Division

DATE: August 24, 2015

SUBJECT: Sign Variance Petition, BA Case 15-003S
Petitioner: GGT Oxford Venture MD, LLC
Sign Permit: S15000152 (Labeled as Sign B)
Location: "Woodfield" Oxford Square 7020 Southmoor Street, Hanover MD 21076

Request Description:

The petitioner is proposing to erect an internally illuminated (embedded LED) projecting sign for the "Woodfield" Oxford Square Townhomes project.

This proposed projecting sign (Labeled as Sign B) would be located on the northwest side of Building #2, which is located at 7020 Southmoor Street, Hanover, MD 21076. The front edge of Sign B would be located almost 122 ft. from the right-of-way of Coca Cola Drive. The left side of sign B would sit back approximately 146 ft. from the right-of-way of St. Margarets Blvd. *(Sign 'B'-Projecting Sign Woodfield at Oxford Square 7010 Southmoor Street)*

The design of proposed Sign B consists of a rectangular shaped cabinet, which would be fabricated out of aluminum. This type of sign design is sometimes referred to as a deep double-sided sign cabinet. Routed into the fabricated aluminum sign cabinet is a "Leaf-Branch" design. On both sides of the cabinet face there are ¾" thick, translucent acrylic design panels with ¾" thick, translucent acrylic push through letters. These letters spell out "Woodfield Oxford Square" which is intended to be internally illuminated with embedded LED's. *(Oxford Square Sign B- Projecting Sign Scale 1:22 and attachment Sign B- Projecting Sign Scale 1:22 Section View)*

Each of the proposed double-sided sign panels have a height of 10ft. /0 in., and width of 2ft. /6.25 in., for a total of 25.21 sq. ft. of signage. The combined total signage of both panels is 50.42 sq. ft. The bottom of the sign cabinet is 15 ft. /0 in., from the finished grade. The total height of the sign is 25 ft. /0 in., from finished grade to top of sign.

Request Description: Cont:

The top of the Building #2 roof is 30ft. /6 in. above the top of sign B. The combined height of Building # 2's roof is 55 ft. /6 inches from finished grade. (*"Woodfield" Oxford Square A1.0 B/ Elevations Facing St. Margarets Blvd.*)

Findings of Fact:

This technical evaluation from the perspective of the Howard County Sign Code is based upon the BA 15-003S variance petition package submitted by GGT Oxford Venture MD, LLC, dated May 22, 2015. Site plans and building elevations were prepared by Hord Coplan Macht, Inc., located at 750 E. Pratt Street, Suite 1100, Baltimore, MD 21202. These plans depict the proposed configuration of Parcel K of the "Woodfield" at Oxford Square Townhomes project which is located at 7020 Southmoor Street, Hanover, MD 21076. *Site plans labeled: (Sign B- Projecting Sign, Site Plan Scale 1:22, "Woodfield" at Oxford Square) and ("Woodfield" at Oxford Square Parcel 'K' (Woodfield) showing the roadways and the location of Proposed Monument Sign A and Proposed Projecting Sign B) and building elevation ("Woodfield" Oxford Square A1.0 B/ Elevations Facing St. Margarets Blvd.)*

The proposed sign would be in violation of the following section of the Howard County Sign Code, To Wit:

Sec. 3.501. (c)(2)(i) - Sign standards by district.

(c) Commercial Districts, Commercial Areas, Industrial Districts and Industrial Areas.

(2) Location:

(i)Projecting signs. *The provisions of this paragraph shall not apply in Downtown Columbia. Projecting signs may project over public rights-of-way only where there is no building setback, and then it may project no more than 42 inches beyond the right-of-way line. It may be no closer than eight feet to a curb line without variance from the Board of Appeals, except that on commercial properties within the Ellicott City Historic District it may be no closer than three feet to a curb line without variance from the Board of Appeals, and must have a minimum clearance of ten feet above the finished grade of a sidewalk and 18 feet above any road, driveway or alley. No projecting sign or supporting structure shall project more than 42 inches from the wall of a building, nor be less than ten feet from the ground level at the base of the building, nor be higher than 25 feet from the ground level to the top of the sign on a multistory building, and above the first floor, no window or part of a window shall be situated within the area, or surface area, as defined herein, of such sign, or its supporting structure, nor shall any such sign or part of such sign or its supporting structure cover any window or part of a window. Furthermore, no projecting sign or supporting structure shall be located in such a manner as to obstruct the light and vision of a window. Every face of a projecting sign shall be considered as a separate sign for the purposes of computing the allowable area, and the sum of the areas to all faces of a projecting sign shall not exceed 25 square feet. No projecting sign or supporting sign or supporting structure shall extend above the top of the wall.*

As per the Sign Code, projecting signs can only have a total of 25.0 sq. ft. of signage. Each of the proposed double-sided sign panels, have a total of 25.21 sq. ft. of signage. The combined total signage of both panels is 50.42 sq. ft. The combined total of both panels is 25.42 sq. ft. of signage more than the sign code would allow without a variance.

The proposed internally illuminated sign must comply with following section of the Howard County Sign Code, To Wit:

Sec. 3.508 (a)(b) – Illumination:

*(a)Shading. The light from any illuminated sign or billboard or from any light source, including interior of a building, shall be so shaded, shielded or directed that the light intensity or brightness shall not adversely affect surrounding or facing premises nor adversely affect safe vision of operators of vehicles moving on public or private roads, highways or parking areas. **Light shall not shine or reflect on or into residential structures.***

(b)Blinking or Flashing. Except as provided in section 3.502A of this subtitle, a sign shall not have blinking, flashing or fluttering lights or other illuminating devices which have a changing light operated as to create an appearance or illusion of writing or printing. A variance may be granted by the Board of Appeals for movement showing the date, the time and the temperature exclusively. Nothing contained in this section shall, however, be construed as preventing the use of lights or decorations related to religious and patriotic festivities. Beacon lights or search lights shall not be permitted as a sign for advertising purposes.

Variance Requirement Questions:

Are there unique physical conditions or exceptional topographical conditions peculiar to the property on which the proposed signs are to be located, including the location of existing buildings and other structures, irregularity, narrowness or shallowness of the lot, irregularity of the road right-of-way, location on a highway that has a dependency on nonlocal use?

Yes, there is an exceptional topographical condition, to wit: There is about a ten to fifteen foot rise in elevation to the first floor of the building where the sign is to be located. Due to this elevation, while traveling either north or southbound at the posted speed limit of 35 mph on Coca Cola Drive, you would only be able to see the one side of the sign for a very short distance. When stopped at the Coca Cola Drive stop sign, you will have to make a 120 degree angle turn toward you right side, to see the sign panel. The proposed projecting sign B, would sit back almost 134 ft. from the right-of-way at this intersection stop sign on Coca Cola Drive and St. Margarets Blvd. The left side panel of the proposed projecting sign B, sits back almost 146 ft. from the right-of-way of St. Margarets Blvd.

Despite being twice the legal size allowed by the code, the proposed projecting sign B, would still be difficult to read while driving on either Coca Cola Drive or St. Margarets Blvd. There are two factors that play into the limited visibility of this proposed sign as follows: The curving road design and the almost 134 ft. site distance from Coca Cola Drive to the sign. The best head on view of proposed sign B, is when traveling southbound on the parcel 'L' access road, located next to its parking lot.

(Please see photographs on next two pages)

Sign Variance Petition BA 15-003S
Sign Permit: Sign B: S15000152
GGT Oxford Venture MD, LLC
August 24, 2015



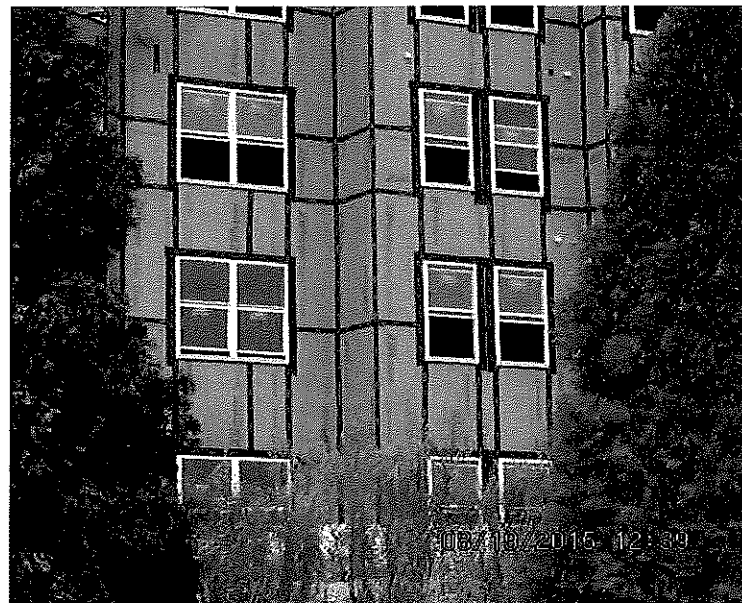
View from St. Margarets Blvd. sidewalk looking toward proposed sign location
It appears to be about a ten to fifteen foot rise in elevation to the first floor of the building where the sign is to be located from this view.



View of sign location from side yard



View from Coca Cola Drive sidewalk looking toward proposed sign location.
Sign would be behind the 2nd. temporary bush from the right side
(These bushes are going to be removed later by developer)



Close up view from same location as photo above standing on
Coca Cola Drive sidewalk looking toward proposed sign location

Are there obstructions, such as excessive grade, building interference, structures or landscaping on abutting property or properties which seriously interfere with the visibility of a proposed sign?

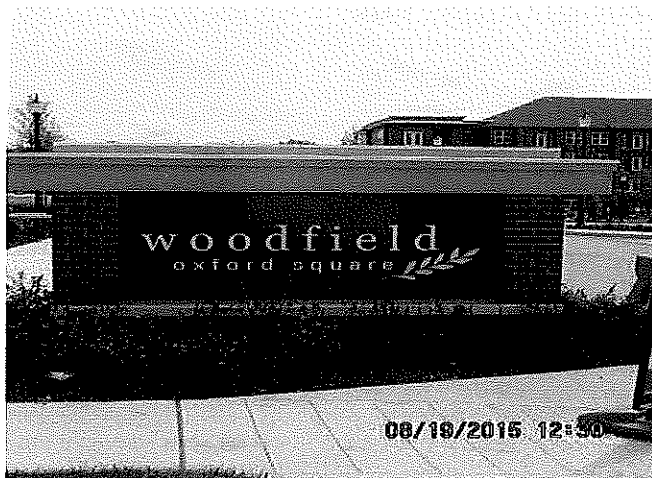
Yes, there is an excessive grade differential. There is an estimated ten to fifteen foot rise in elevation to the first floor of the building where the sign is to be located. The site plan provided did not include elevations.

Are there are historical, architectural or aesthetic characteristics which shall be considered?

Yes, there are architectural and aesthetic characteristics to consider as follows: From my conversations with the petitioner as well as the review of the variance package submitted, it was discovered that there are separate architectural sign guidelines in place as required by the project owner/developer. As noted on page (3), of the variance package, # (8) (C) a ground mounted sign is prohibited by the owner/developer. There was a concession made by the Oxford Square Project owner/developer, to allow only the ground mounted sign labeled (Sign A-See Photograph Below), because it is located inside of the site project.

The architectural design chosen for the proposed sign, as well as the sign's scale and location on the building, are appropriate for this "Woodfield" project.

Please see the attached Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning dated 8/11/15.



View of existing ground mounted sign labeled Sign A within Variance

If the variance is granted, will it adversely affect the appropriate use or development of adjacent properties, or result in a dangerous traffic condition?

No, it would not affect the use and development of adjacent properties nor would it result in a dangerous traffic condition.

Please also see the attached Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning dated 8/11/15.

Sign Variance Petition BA 15-003S
Sign Permit: Sign B: S15000152
GGT Oxford Venture MD, LLC
August 24, 2015

Is the requested Variance the minimum necessary to afford relief, and can it being granted without substantial impairment of the intent, purpose and integrity of the code?

Yes, as long as light from the proposed internally illuminated sign is shaded, shielded or directed so that the light intensity or brightness does not shine or reflect on or into residential structures.

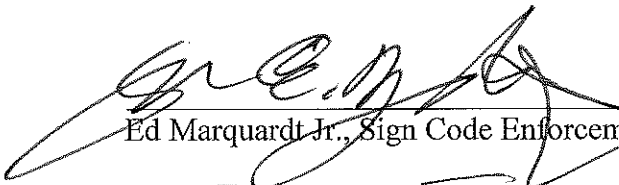
Please also see the attached Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning dated 8/11/15.

Were the practical difficulties or hardships created by the Applicant?

No. Please see the attached Internal Memorandum from the Department of Planning and Zoning dated 8/11/15.

The hearing date for this case has been scheduled for September 10, 2015 at 9:30 a.m.

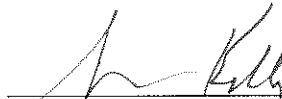
Report Prepared by:


Ed Marquardt Jr., Sign Code Enforcement/Inspector

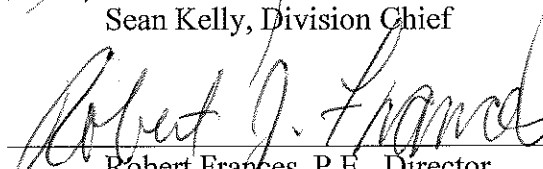
Report Reviewed by:


Brenda Saucedo, Supervising Sign Code Inspector

Report Reviewed by:


Sean Kelly, Division Chief

Report Approved by:


Robert Frances, P.E., Director
Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits

BA15-003S Sign Permit: S15000152 Oxford Village Sign Variance

Attachments: Dace Blaumanis, DPZ Review of BA 15-003S, dated 8/11/2015



Howard County

Internal Memorandum

Subject: BA Case No. 15-003S Sign Variance Petition

To: Ed Marquardt, Jr., Code Enforcement Officer
Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits
Inspections and Enforcement Division

Through: Valdis Lazdins, Director
Department of Planning and Zoning

From: Dace Blaumanis, Planner
Department of Planning and Zoning
Division of Comprehensive and Community Planning (DCCP)

Date: August 11, 2015

DCCP reviewed the Sign Variance Petition BA 15-003S submitted on behalf of **GGT Oxford Venture MD, LLC**, located at 7020 Southmoor Street.

The proposed projecting sign's materials and style for the multistory apartment building fit the character of the building and the development, Oxford Square, a Transit Oriented Development. However, the projecting sign is proposed to be lit at night. Because the proposed projecting sign is located next to second floor apartment windows, the lit sign may adversely affect the use of those apartment units adjacent to the projecting sign. The light from the sign would spill into the apartment windows.

The apartment building is visible from two streets: Coca Cola Drive and St. Margarets Boulevard. No interference with the visibility of the building is noted. Could the sign be simplified so that it is more easily readable from Coca Cola Drive without the need to increase the size of the sign? Has the applicant considered a flat wall sign that will not shine directly, if lit, into adjacent apartment windows? Alternately, the apartment building could be identified at the proposed monument sign A, located at the entrance to the block on Southmoor Street. It appears that overcoming the practical difficulties of identifying the apartment building from Coca Cola Drive have not been fully explored and that other proposals meeting the sign code could be put forward.

Because the proposed sign, as submitted, could be a nuisance to the apartment dwellers and because it appears other permissible signs could fulfill the function of the proposed sign, DCCP recommends that the projecting sign variance be denied.

If you have questions, please contact me at ext. 4324.

cc: Bill Mackey, Chief, Division of Comprehensive and Community Planning